



News Release

For immediate release: February 17, 2011

(11-023)

Contacts: [Carolyn Cox](#), Office of Drinking Water
[Donn Moyer](#), Communications Office

360-236-3162
360-236-4076

Troubled water system gets new court-appointed owner

OLYMPIA – A Cowlitz County Superior Court commissioner is temporarily transferring ownership of the troubled Columbia Crest Estates water system to a third party.

The state Department of Health sought the emergency order because the Cowlitz County Public Utility District (PUD) told residents that the system owner's account is seriously past due. The PUD planned to shut off power to the water system's wells, which would've left the 22-home subdivision between Woodland and Kalama with no water service at all. This is the third time within a year that the PUD has issued shut-off notices.

"This was the final straw," said Denise Clifford, director of the agency's Office of Drinking Water. "The system already has operational and water quality problems that have left customers without safe and reliable drinking water at the tap. If the power was shut off, they would be faced with absolutely no water at all, simply because the owner wouldn't pay the electric bill. That's an unacceptable and needless threat to public health."

Customers have not been able to drink water from their taps since June 2, 2010. The agency issued a health advisory at that time because a water line broke and system pressure was lost, which could have allowed bacteria and other contaminants to get into the water lines. In addition, there was no certified operator to oversee repairs and disinfect the water system.

Cowlitz County Court Commissioner Gary Bashor issued an order today granting temporary ownership of the water system to a state-recommended receiver, the Kelso-based Beacon Hill Water and Sewer District. Bashor set a hearing for February 28 to give the owner a chance to state his case. State health officials will work with the water district to restore reliable service and ensure the water meets safe drinking water standards.

-More-

This isn't the only legal case involving Columbia Crest Estates water system and its owner, Dan Class of Vancouver. Last year, the Department of Health fined Class \$21,060 for violating state health orders to properly maintain the water system, and for missing deadlines toward installing an approved arsenic treatment system. The violations included failure to regularly monitor water quality and failure to obtain a certified operator to run the system as the state requires. His appeal of the fine is scheduled to be heard by an agency health law judge on March 30.

Nineteen homeowners have filed a complaint with the state Utilities and Transportation Commission against Class. The homeowners are asking for reimbursement of fees paid since the water system was put in service nearly 10 years ago as well as for individual homeowners' expenses for bottled water and water treatment equipment.

"A properly run 10-year-old water system shouldn't be having these problems," Clifford said. "We appreciate the Beacon Hill Water and Sewer District stepping up to manage this system, and we are committed to using all of our tools to ensure that Columbia Crest Estates residents can have safe and reliable tap water that meets our high standards."

###

Visit the Washington Department of Health website at http://www.doh.wa.gov for a healthy dose of information.
